

RAISED FLOOR ACCESS PANEL

INVENTOR

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Cross Reference to Related Applications.

Not Applicable.

Statement of Federally Sponsored Research.

Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the invention.

[0002] The present invention relates to raised floor access panels. In particular, it relates to an interchangeable floor panel having leveling, lifting or locking devices.

[0003] 2. Description of the related art.

[0004] Raised floors are commonly used to create a space between a sub-floor and the normal working environment of a room. The sub-floor is the surface that would serve as the floor of a room before a raised floor has been installed. The space between the sub-floor and the raised floor is used to hold electrical wiring and fiber optic cables, to contain an air plenum chase, and more generally to contain anything that must be in a room but is more safely or conveniently enclosed in an area apart from the main area of the room.

[0005] Raised floor panels are generally of a solid design or have perforations to allow air flow. The perforated panels allow better ventilation than solid panels and provide a smoother working surface and greater strength than grills. The usual method to support a raised floor is to place a support pedestal under each corner of the floor panels. Innovations in raised floor support structures have focused on refinements in corner support systems. For example, U.K. Patent Application No. 2-267-720-A of Haung describes a system where the corner support pedestals are connected to one another by a grid. Another support system, describing U.S. Pat. No. 5,048,242 of Cline includes stringers attached between support pedestals. Again, the pedestals support the panels at their corners and additional support is achieved at the edges of the panels by the stringers. In a stringer system, the panels and stringers are attached to the pedestal heads using screws.

[0006] Various under-structure designs are utilized to support the panel and adjusting levelness of the top working surface is predominantly accomplished through a plurality of adjustable support pedestal heads. Panels are either gravity held or screwed to the adjustable pedestal head. Removal of the panels is accomplished by unscrewing the corner screws, where utilized, and lifting the panel with suction cup lifters. In cases of perforated air flow panels, no common industry standard is supplied for lifting devices which leads to the use of unsafe, non-compliant instruments such as a screwdriver, grasping hook, knives, needle-nose pliers and the like for removal and replacement.

[0007] Although the primary purpose of a panel is to structurally support an applied load, they must also be easily and safely removed and re-inserted. This is required for the relocation of work cubicles, equipment, wiring, cabling and air flow disbursement to appropriate heat load designs.

[0008] Moreover the use of gravity held panels or corner lock screw panels does not provide secure access to sensitive electronic highways. With either a suction cup lifter or screwdriver, any of the past or present floor panels can be easily removed providing unsecured access to what has become a central nervous system for a great many organizations.

[0009] Thus, what is needed is to provide a raised floor access panel which is interchangeable with a variety of floor panel systems together with an integrated lifting device for the safe removal and re-insertion of panels with a key lock system, if so desired. There is also a need for a panel having a screwless corner lock forcing the panel to an underside of an adjustable pedestal stantion. The present invention satisfies these needs.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a panel which is interchangeable with a variety of floor panel designs.

[0011] It is another object of the present invention to provide a panel having an integrated lifting device for the safe and easy removal and re-insertion of the panels.

[0012] It is another object of the present invention to provide a panel that achieves a positive corner lock between the panel and the underside of pedestal stantions.

[0013] It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a panel which incorporates a key entry lock for secured access to the sub-floor.

[0014] To overcome the problems of the prior art and in accordance with the purpose of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, briefly, a raised floor access panel is provided which includes a substantially flat panel having an upper load supporting surface and a lower surface to be supported on a plurality of pedestal support members each adjacent to a corner of the panel, and at least one panel lifter having a top wall and two side walls, the side walls slidably extending through a first and second slots in a plate rigidly attached to the lower surface for vertical travel of the top wall and side walls upwardly, through a generally rectangular panel recess.

[0015] Additional advantages of the present invention will be set forth in part in the description that follows and in part will be obvious from that description or can be learned from practice of the invention. The advantages of the invention can be realized and obtained by the apparatus particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and which constitute a part of the specification, illustrate at least one embodiment of the invention and, together with the description, explain the principles of the invention.

[0017] FIG. 1 is a top view of a perforated panel showing a preferred relationship to the panel lifters.

[0018] FIG.2 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a panel lifter while locked in a closed position.

[0019] FIG.3 is a side view of a panel lifter including one embodiment of the locking mechanism.

[0020] FIG.4 is a side view of a panel lifter installed in a panel having a leveling device in accordance with the present invention.

[0021] FIG.5 is an exploded view of the panel lifter in a raised unlocked position in relation to other panels to form a raised floor matrix.

[0022] FIG. 6 is a top view of the panel lifter in a locked position showing the location of the panel leveler in relationship to the pedestal.

[0023] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the illustration of FIG. 6.

[0024] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of the illustration of FIG. 7 but showing the panel lifter in an open and unlocked position.

[0025] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the underside of the panel lifter showing a second embodiment of the panel lifter locking mechanism and an adjustable corner lock.

[0026] FIG. 10 is a side view of the perspective view shown in FIG. 9.

[0027] FIG. 11 is an opposite side view from view shown in FIG 10.

[0028] FIG. 12 is an underside perspective view of the second embodiment for the locking mechanism showing the lock releasing from a latch.

[0029] FIG. 13 is a side view of the panel lifter moving upwardly to disengage the corner lock.

[0030] FIG. 14 is an underside perspective view of the illustration in FIG. 13.

[0031] FIG. 15 is a side view of the panel lifter in a raised position with the corner lock fully disengaged from the pedestal.

[0032] FIG. 16 is an underside perspective view of the illustration in FIG 15.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0033] Unless specifically defined otherwise, all technical or scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs.

[0034] Although any methods and materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the present invention, the preferred methods and materials are now described. Reference now will be made in detail to the presently preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings wherein like numerals represent like features.

[0035] The invention provides an interchangeable system for use with all raised access floor panels well known in the art. FIG. 1 is a top view of a perforated panel 1 showing a preferred arrangement of the integrated panel lifters 10 and panel levelers 5. As shown in FIG.s

2, 3, and 4, the panel lifters **10** include a top wall **12** and two side walls **13, 14**. At the end of each side wall **13, 14** is a stop **15** which restricts the panel lifter **10** from traveling out of the panel **1** when removing or re-installing the panel in a floor matrix. As shown in the drawing figures, the panel lifter **10** may, but need not, include a locking mechanism **20**. The first embodiment shown in these drawing figures is a key lock **20** centrally mounted in the top wall **12** of the panel lifter **10**. The key locking mechanism **20** terminates in a locking tab **22** which, when the panel lifter top plate **12** is in a downward position substantially flush with a plate **30**, attached to the underside of the panel with a rivet or weld, travels through a key shaped hole in the plate **36**. The panel **1** is then locked to a pedestal **38** by inserting a key in the lock and turning the tab **22** against an underside of the plate **38** and removing the key.

[0036] Panel levelers **5** may, but need not, be provided at each corner of the panel **1** to adjust a distance between the pedestal head **38** and the underside-side of the panel. In this manner, the floor panel according to the present invention can be used to replace old or damaged panels of different thickness by adjusting the distance to a position where the panel top surface is on a plane with the existing raised floor panels of a different manufacture. The panel levelers are preferably a hex head threaded connector (not shown) through a collar extending through the corner hole **5** in the panel. The panel leveler desirably includes a foot **3** for resting on the pedestal. The foot **3** is adjustably moved in an upward or downward direction, relative to the panel, by turning a hex head driver through the hole **5** in the panel **1**.

[0037] Turning now to FIG.5, where it is shown an exploded view of the panel lifter **10** in a raised unlocked position relative to the other panels **2** previously installed to form a raised floor matrix. In the raised position, the stops **15** on the side wall ends **13, 14** engage a bottom plate **30** so that the panel lifter **10** does not slide out of the first **32** and second **34** slots in the plate **30**.

[0038] Figures 6, and 7 show a top and perspective view, respectively, of the panel lifter **10** in a locked position and the location of the panel levelers **5** in relationship to the adjustable pedestal head **38**. Figure **8** shows a perspective view of the plate **30** and a second embodiment of the locking mechanism **40**, but shows the panel lifter **10** in an open and unlocked position.

[0039] The second embodiment of the locking mechanism and a preferred embodiment of the adjustable corner lock are illustrated in figures 9, 10, 11, and 12. Here, the lock 40 is centrally mounted in the plate 30 with a hole 42 in the top plate 12 for key insertion. The hole 42 also serves as a finger grip for lifting the panel lifter 10 in an upward direction. In the plate 30, a third slot 46 is provided for receiving a latch member 44 attached to the underside of the top wall 12 of the panel lifter 10. Also attached to the underside of the plate 30 is a ninety degree angle bracket 45 for pivotal attachment of a lever arm 50 at a pivot point 54 on the angle bracket 45. At a first end 53 of the lever arm 50 is a cylindrical threaded housing 56 for adjustably receiving a threaded corner lock 58.

[0040] As shown in Figures 9, 10, and 11, when the tab 41 on the lock 40 of the second embodiment is turned into a slot 46 in the latch 44 the top wall 12 of the panel lifter is recessed into the panel so as to provide a flush panel load supporting surface for rolling, sliding or walking. In this locked position, the side walls 13, 14 of the panel lifter 12 engage the second end 52 of the lever arm 50 downwardly forcing the lever arm 50 to pivot on the angle bracket 45 and the corner lock 58 to bias forcefully against the adjustable pedestal support 38 to anchor, and if desired, lock the panel in place to provide a secure enclosed environment.

[0041] The force of the corner lock 58 against the pedestal member 38 is easily withdrawn for removal of the panel 1. FIG. 12 shows an underside perspective view of the second embodiment of the locking mechanism showing the locking tab 41 releasing from the latch 44. To remove the panel 1 from the pedestal 38 one turns the key lock and urges the panel lifter 10 in an upward direction. As shown in Figures 13 and 14, as the panel lifter 10 is urged upward, a side wall 14 of the panel lifter 10 releases a tension on the lever arm second end 52 whereby the lever arm first end 53 and corner lock 58 pivot away from the pedestal support 38. In Figures 15 and 16 the panel lifter 10 is shown in a fully raised position for removing the panel 1 and the corner lock 58 has fully released from the underside of a two tier adjustable support 38.

[0042] While the present invention has been described in connection with the illustrated embodiments, it will be appreciated and understood that modifications may be made without departing, from the true spirit and scope of the invention.